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# CONNECTICUT GRAVESTONES
## II

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*Fig. 1*

Connecticut had many gravestone cutters in the seventeenth century, but only a few of them should ever be taken seriously. Even were it possible it would serve no useful purpose to catalogue the numerous local yokels throughout the colony who with more brawn than skill crudely cut a few initials and numerals on boulders which served as gravestones, particularly when better stones were too costly or otherwise unavailable. A few men, however, devoted considerable thought, time and labor to their work, and the most successful of these deserve to be classified as colonial artists. George Griswold (1633-1704), the earliest stonecutter so far identified, was the subject of a previous communication; and could he be identified another artist in Simsbury deserves some recognition, for his well-executed but unaffected style also appeals to the average eye. This paper concerns a third artist, perhaps the best known and most popular of all if one can judge from the number and geographical distribution of his extant stones. His services were in demand mostly in Middletown and Hartford, but he also carved stones for prominent families in Suffield, Windsor, Wethersfield, Glastonbury, Lyme, and Preston. Indeed, both he and Griswold were recognized as far away as Boston, and in the old Granary, Copp's Hill, and King's Chapel graveyards can be seen many large table-stones from Connecticut sandstone quarries, despite the fact that Boston gravestone artists were as skilful as those to be found anywhere in the British colonies. For some reason, possibly because slate stones of the required size could not be easily quarried, a Connecticut table-stone soon became the mark of affluence and distinction in the largest and most important city of the colonies.

Just as Eva L. Butler's abstracts of the Winthrop manuscripts furnished the clue that eventually led to the discovery of George Griswold, so the same abstracts sent me scurrying to Boston in quest of this other artist. The Massachusetts Historical Society possesses four or five letters from Capt. John Ham-

lin of Middletown to John Winthrop of New London which reveal that the stonecutter's name was Stanclift. It appears that he had made a contract with Wait Winthrop of Boston for a tombstone to cost about £ 4 - 8 - 0, and the money, according to directions, was to be paid to Nathaniel Loring, who in turn was to send to Stanclift forty gallons of molasses. Reading between the lines it appears that the molasses was delivered but not the tombstone, for the "ould man" died not only before the stone was even quarried but also without his leaving any record of the transactions. Apparently hearing of Stanclift's death (a very severe influenza epidemic swept through Connecticut at that time) Winthrop dispatched a letter on October 7, 1712, to his friend Hamlin in Middletown. About seven months later Hamlin answered:

Middletown May the 2th: 1713.

Mr John Winthrop.

Sr yours of the: 7th of october: Last Came to my hand & I observed the Contents am sory I have ben so unfortunate in your small Affaire there was no such stones gott before the ould man dyed tho they ware payd for and since Little hath ben don of that natuer by reason the ould quary was spent and no new one Could be opened til the frost was out of the ground: and they had much Stone Ingaged and payd for before yours ware spoke for but I hope they will com in time: I have spoke with them about the 4lb 10s: you say your father payd them for A tomb ston: but the young men say they know nothing of itt: and therefore desier you would inform them when itt was and who it was payd so that they may make Enquiry about it for there sattisfaction this with mine & my wifes harty service to your selfe & Lady is all the nedefull at present

From your humble servantt
John Hamlin

[Superscribed] Capt Hamlin May 2 1713
To Mr John Winthrop in New London
per Capt Georg Philips.

A good two *years* later, the administrator of Stanclift's estate was still not satisfied that the money had ever been paid to Loring, whereupon the justly irritated John Winthrop forwarded all the pertinent papers, including Loring's receipt, to Middletown with a stern demand for justice. Hamlin's second letter follows:

Midletown Novembr ye 2th 1715

Mr John Winthrop

Sr inclosed is the papers you gave me about ould mr Stanclifts Engagement to your Hond Father About A tomb I have shoed them to his Eldest son that Is Administator on his fathers Estate and he tels me If they ware now to be bargained for they woold not be don for halfe as much more but I tould him he must perform his fathers Ingagement seing he had recevd good part of the mony Long since so then he sayd he would do it and now he tels me it is Almost don fitt to set up but he thinks it will be best not to set it up till the Spring that the work may have the sumer to settle it before any frost coms to heave it. which might rong it If it ware set up before the winter sets in and I advised him so to do thinking it might be best this with my harty service to your selfe and good Lady Is all the nedefull at present from Sr

Your humble Servantt
John Hamlin

[Superscribed] To Mr John Winthrop Living In New London per Izrahiah Wetmore papers & Rects for the Tomb at Boston dated 1710.

These letters leave no doubt that the "ould man" Stanclift who made the original bargain was James, first settler in East Middletown, who died October 3, 1712, according to his gravestone, aged "about 78 years." Possibly he did some brass and smith work on the side, but a partial list from his estate which amounted in all to £ 191-3-10 shows that he was primarily interested in cutting stone:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| gun and amunition | 01 | 01 | 06 |
| quary tools | 05 | 14 | 08 |
| Iron and steel and smith tools | 02 | 14 | 02 |
| stone cut out of the quary | 07 | 04 | 04 |
| brass | 03 | 01 | 00 |
| several books | 00 | 12 | 00 |
| dwelling hous and shop | 30 | 00 | 00 |
| half an acre of land abuting on the quary and the quary | 12 | 00 | 00 |
| six acres of land at home | 15 | 00 | 00 |

Absolute proof that Stanclift carved any early stones in Middletown has not yet been obtained. He was paid £ 2 - 8 - 0 from the estate of Obadiah Allen Jr. (Middletown, 1702), presumably for a gravestone but, unfortunately, Allen's stone cannot now be found. There are, however, some twelve or fifteen stones in the Riverside Cemetery in Middletown which have many characteristics in common, and since none is dated after 1712 (the latest still standing is 1705) they may safely be credited to the "ould man." For the most part these stones have simple, rounded tops, though there are a few with square or with rounded, ornamented shoulders. Just as nowadays some persons can frequently be identified by their handwriting, so colonial stonecutters can frequently be identified by their distinctive peculiarities in lettering. Stanclift's peculiarities consisted of his invariable use of capital letters which were unusually large in proportion to the size of the stone, carefully cut letters with serifs, frequent use of dots or periods between words, and, most important of all, a distinctive capital A, sometimes crossed, sometimes not, but invariably cut with a long horizontal bar like a canopy across the top (Fig. 1). Occasionally he used Roman numerals; and sometimes when making a double L as in HALL or SHALL he placed the second L within the angle of the first. He apparently abhorred a vacant space for his inscriptions usually occupied the whole front surface of the stone and left no room for a border. Once in a while he managed to include a fairly long verse, which, incidentally, has a faint resemblance to modern poetry:

HERE · LYES · OVR · DEACON
HALL · WHO · STVDYED
PEACE · WITHALL · WAS
VPRIGHT · IN · HIS · LIFE · VOYD
OF MALIGNANT · STRIFE
GON · TO · HIS · REST · LEFT VS
IN · SORROW · DOVBTLES
HIS · GOOD · WORKS · WILL
HIM · FOLLOW

*Fig. 2*

*Fig. 3*

If all Connecticut gravestones with such canopied capital A's can be attributed to the first James Stanclift (and there are very few about which I have any doubt) then he was the first Connecticut artist to depict a skull. He probably had never seen the exquisitely carved winged-skulls on Boston gravestones else he would never have attempted to imitate them, but it is likely that he did hear about them from some Middletown sea captain who had sailed down the river and away to Boston to swap cheese for sealing wax or tombstones for molasses. At any rate, the little stone for Hannah Sumner (Middletown, 1689) as well as the stone for Richard Smith Jr. (Glastonbury, 1703) are among the very few remaining examples of James Stanclift's primitive designs. (Figs. 2 & 3)

Very likely it was this first James Stanclift who quarried the original covering stone on the tomb for Henry Jr. and Captain Samuel Wolcott (Windsor, 1709). Unfortunately the present stone appears to be a reproduction, and, more unfortunately, there probably was no inscription on the original. Nevertheless the details concerning the construction of this tomb show that it was a major undertaking:

| | |
|---|---|
| To Stantlif for the covering Stoone | 4..10..0 |
| To half the charge of thre men two day to fech two stoones from middletown boat victuals and drinke | 0..12..6 |
| To carting ye stone up petty charges 2s picking Stoone and carting to ye burying yard and a Stone bought of Gibs* to ingrave all | 0..07..8 |

* This Gibbs has not as yet been definitely identified. He probably engraved the stones on the sides of this tomb. This lettering is somewhat similar to the lettering on the gravestones for William Allen (1701), Mary Allen (1703), Kathern Gibbs (1660), and the Reverend Ephraim Huit (1644). There is a similar stone in Springfield dated 1664. This lettering resembles George Griswold's lettering in many ways,

| | |
|---|---|
| To a barill of lime at hertford fraight and Caryage | 0..07..0 |
| To two men to tend masun a day horse to draw small stons & sand | 0..05..0 |
| To 2 large Stoones to build on and Carting of them | 0..05..0 |
| To carting the top stone to ye burying yard & treating the hands | 0..01..6 |
| To cart more Stons a hand to tend masun a day, drink for 12 hand to lay on ye stone | 0..05..0 |
| To ye masun for his work 30s my trobell in this a faire 5s | 1..15..0 |

Stanclift left a widow, Mary, who died in December, 1712; a daughter, Martha, who married Thomas Bevin; and two sons, William and James, both of whom cut gravestones. The stonecutting art was dominant in the Stanclift blood, for the trade was handed down from one generation to the next throughout the eighteenth century.

## WILLIAM STANCLIFT (1687(?)-1761)

William Stanclift, elder of the two sons, administered his father's estate, carved the gravestones for his parents, and because of similarity in styles, he seems to have been very closely associated with his father in the gravestone business. In fact, there is one stone in Old Lyme (Phebe Marvil, 1707) which has canopied capital A's like those cut by James the first, but which should probably be attributed to William's apprentice days because it has so many blunders on it, such as backward capital G's and N's, as well as a verse which the father would have been ashamed of:

HVR · BODY · ONLY
RESTING · HERE
HVR · SOVL · IS
FLED · TWO · A · HIER
SPEAR

So far, two stones can positively be attributed to William—that for Nathaniel Hooker (Hartford, 1711), the surface of which has been nearly destroyed from shaling, and that for Thomas Barber (Simsbury, 1713), whose estate paid "to Will[m] Stanclift for Tombs. 16s." (Fig. 4). It is a safe conclusion that he also cut the gravestones for his wife, Olive (Wright), who died in East Middletown (once Chatham, now Portland) in 1719 (Fig. 4), because all three stones are so very much alike.

From these examples of his work it is possible to determine some of William's stone-cutting characteristics. Since the father was near the top in his profession, it would have been natural for the son to follow the "ould

yet differs from it in some particulars, notably the capital H's and Y's. The stone for Kathern Gibbs has capital A's with canopies somewhat similar to those cut by James Stanclift, but the texture of this stone shows that it did not originate in the Stanclift quarries. In a previous article the Huit stone was tentatively and perhaps mistakenly attributed to Griswold.

*Fig. 4*

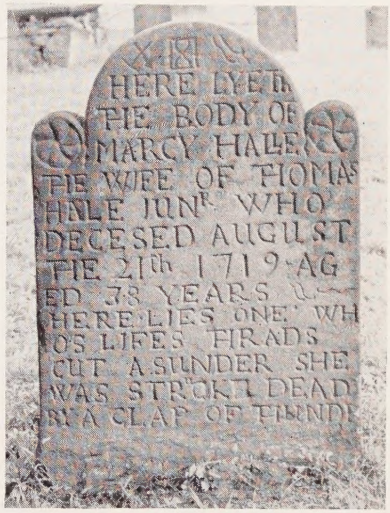
man" in most essentials. Thus we find William generally using capital letters, contracted double L's, and sometimes, especially on his early stones, using dots or periods between words. But as time went on, William acquired other characteristics, most important of which was the five- to eight-petalled rosette in the finial (on the Barber stone this is incomplete and hardly noticeable). He was more inclined than the "ould man" to use combined letters, occasionally combining even three letters into one. To fill in vacant spaces William used short wavy lines, and so ingrained became this habit that the gravestone hunter should be wary in attributing a stone to William without at least a few of these meaningless adornments. At different stages in his career he acquired other minor peculiarities, such as extending the apices of his capital A's a little above the line, carving his capital R's with attractive little bustles, and using a script *th* in *th*e instead of the customary thorn.

By far the most interesting aspect of William's work is the evolution of his skull designs. The skull on his father's table-stone is identical to that on the stone for John Gill (Portland, 1713)* and shows the simple triangular nose and piercing bullet-hole eyes (Fig. 5). Skulls were originally intended to remind passers-by of death and so to frighten them, but if any were frightened by this skull it must have been from seeing hair growing from a scalped calvarium. The sweet, coy skull (Fig. 5) on the stone for John Lay the third (Old Lyme, 1723) is rarely found, for it was only a step in the evolution toward William's common full-face skulls, some sad, some ludicrous, but all resembling the pumpkins children use on Halloween. One can be positively certain that Elizabeth Francis (Newington, 1728) was not an inebriate who died from pneumonia after washing her hair on a Saturday night although the picture on her gravestone makes it seem so (Fig. 5).

* John Gill was the brother of Ebenezer Gill who was paid for the gravestones for Jonathan Smith (Wethersfield, 1728), and Ebenezer's name also appears among the creditors of the estate of Joseph Cole (Rocky Hill, 1733). These gravestones, however, so closely resemble William Stanclift's stones that one is obliged to conclude either that both men made stones which are now indistinguishable or that Gill was acting merely as William's agent. There is nothing in the probate papers to indicate that the Gills carved gravestones.

*Fig. 5*

On rare occasions William carved a border around his inscription, and he also used symbols, such as the pick and shovel alongside the hour-glass on the stone for Marcy Hale who was "struck dead by a clap of thunder" in Glastonbury, 1719 (Fig. 6). But except for his skulls, William's stones are, on the whole, very plain and very much alike. He was an extraordinarily popular stonecutter, nevertheless. In 1724, he swapped Joshua Hempstead a pair of gravestones for "8 lb of wooll", and in 1742 he was still shipping uncut stones to New London for Hempstead to inscribe. In fact, from about 1710 to about 1745 he carved innumerable stones which may still be seen in almost every old town in the Connecticut River valley south of Enfield.




*Photograph by Dr. Wendell C. Hall*

*Fig. 6*

*(To be concluded)*

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*(To be continued)*

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